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ABSTRACT

This position paper, with certain characteristics of a handbook, is part of North Carolina's first instructional packet and was made possible through funds from the Comprehensive School Improvement Project. The focus of this paper is on individualized instruction. Aspects of individualized instruction that are discussed include: the concept of individualized instruction; approaches to individualizing instruction; patterns of organization; responsibilities of the staff, students, administrators, parents, community, and school boards; getting started; opportunities for individualizing instruction; evaluation and accountability; and advantages of individualized instruction. (WR)

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FOR THE LOVE OF LEARNING

A POSITION PAPER ON INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

Planning, Research, and Development
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

SDPI Publication No. 446

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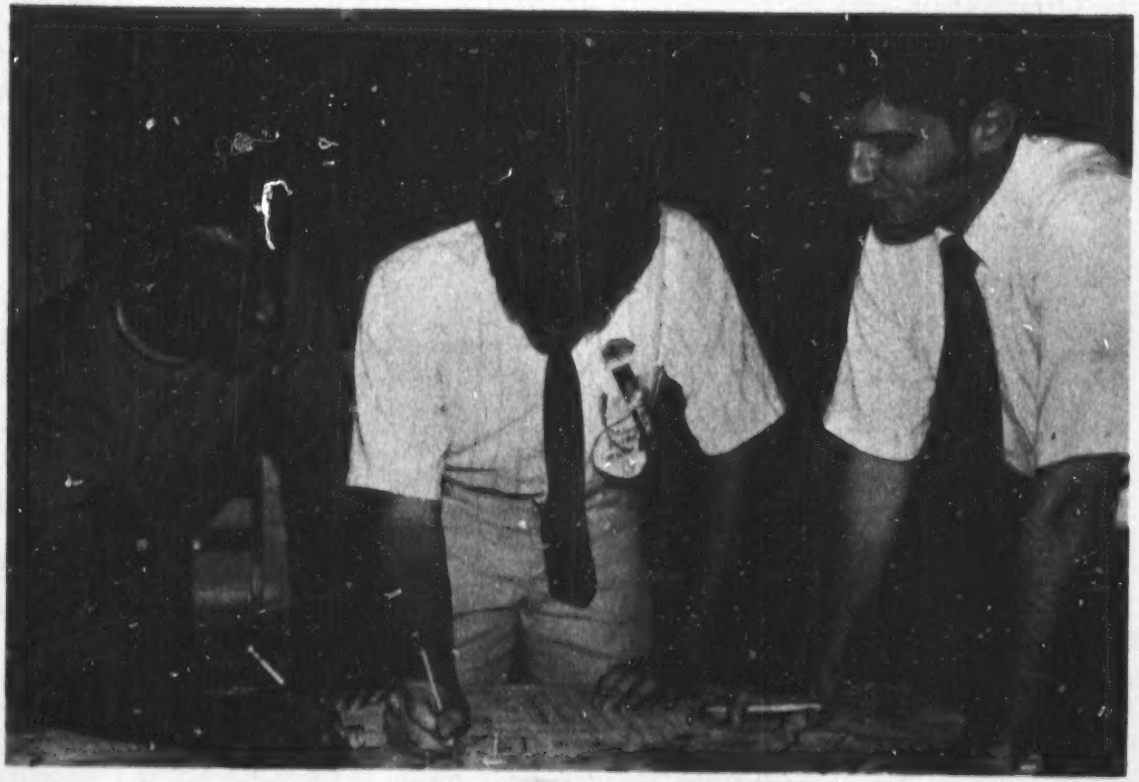

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FOREWORD

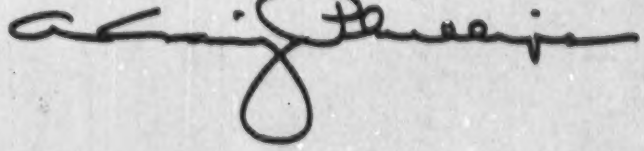
The continuing urgency for making schools personally meaningful for all students constitutes the greatest challenge and the most obvious opportunity facing educators today. Much is being accomplished in the schools of North Carolina through improved teacher preparation, revitalized curricula, utilization of teaching techniques which stress individual involvement, and other positive approaches.

In no area, however, has more progress been made than through efforts to individualize instruction. Practiced by some teachers for many years, individualized instruction is primarily a means for personalizing the educational process and for giving individual meaning to all learning experiences. In its simplest form, it is a system of organizing learning experiences around the individual needs of students, whether working alone or in groups. Though individualized instruction is not synonymous with tutorial instruction, the one-to-one relationship is often necessary as teachers seek to assist students in achieving their separate potentialities.

The statement which follows represents a conviction and a commitment on the part of the Department of Public Instruction. Recognizing that no single approach for improving instruction will be appropriate for all teachers and for all students and that no approach constitutes a panacea, the Department, nevertheless, is convinced that every instructional effort should be focused on improving the learning experiences of the individual. The challenge for making education relevant to each student remains our greatest opportunity for demonstrating our accountability to all the youth of North Carolina.

This position paper, with certain characteristics of a handbook, is part of the state's first instructional packet and was made possible through funds from the Comprehensive School Improvement Project. In addition to this position statement, the packet includes: "For the Love of Learning—Strategies for Implementing Individualized Instruction," a 30-minute, color film with sound; the film script; a study guide for the film; one slide tape emphasizing the concept of individualized instruction; one slide tape emphasizing methods for the implementation of individualized instruction; a listing of resources (books, pamphlets, films, slide tapes, resource personnel, places to visit); a public information brochure —with question and short answers; and radio spots for local use.

In the years ahead it is anticipated that widespread utilization of these materials will make a real difference in the quality of learning throughout the state.



A. Craig Phillips, Superintendent
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IS . . .

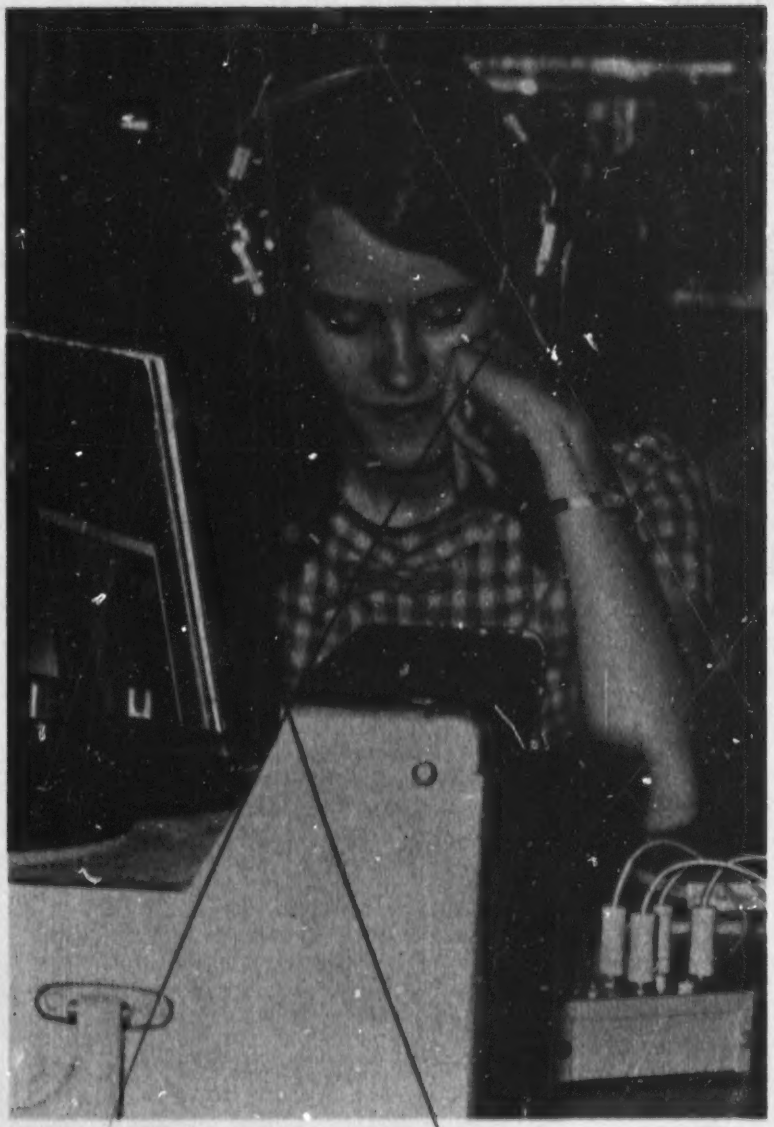
"Individualized instruction" has many meanings for many people. In its simplest form, it is a system of organizing learning experiences around the individual needs of students, whether working alone or in groups. It is an approach for providing experiences which are compatible with each student's particular style of learning, and for incorporating the student's skills and abilities in terms of what he already knows and what he needs to know. Individualized instruction provides —

Maximum opportunity for each student to work on tasks appropriate to his current interests, skills, appreciations, and ambitions

Maximum opportunity to work in those ways and through those media which are most productive for him

Appropriate teacher assistance to each student in terms of his interests, his attitudes, his competencies, and his limitations

Individualized instruction also represents an attitude toward students—a respect for the total person of each, his mind, his body, and his emotions; a "prizing" of what each student is and what each may become. It is **acceptance**. It is **caring**. Though individualized instruction is not synonymous with tutorial instruction, the one-to-one relationship is often necessary as teachers seek to assist students in achieving their separate potentialities. Practiced by some teachers for many years, individualized instruction is primarily a means for personalizing education and for giving individual meaning to learning experiences.



COMMITMENT TO THE CONCEPT

What is known of the learning process itself suggests that its major characteristics are more nearly incorporated in individualized instruction than in any other known approach to learning. Research indicates the soundness of the following concepts:

Learning is an individual process, regardless of the size of the learning group.

Individuals learn at their own pace, a pace which varies in terms of native ability, attainment, interest, environmental factors, motivation, self-concept, and other similar factors.

Students learn when they want to learn—when purposes are understood, seem relevant, and are accepted.

What students think of themselves and what they perceive others to think and feel about them is highly related to their capacity to learn.

Learning best takes place when there are warm, interpersonal relations between teacher and student.

Students learn best when there is a total atmosphere conducive to learning: freedom to ask questions, explore, disagree, and make mistakes; well-informed teachers; teachers who understand and respect students—their likenesses and differences, their capabilities and limitations, their efforts to identify even when they rebel and become disenchanted.

Creative individual involvement in determining goals, planning for the achievement of goals, and in evaluating goals tends to foster motivation and commitment for intellectual achievement, realistic self-concepts, and the development of attitudes, habits, and skills desirable for self-realization.

The manner in which teaching is done is just as important, and often more so, than what is taught; process is often content; process is often product.

Attitudes and appreciations can be taught.

Students are frequently more effective "teachers" of other students than teachers themselves.

Self-evaluation among students tends to strengthen the teaching-learning process.

Flexibility in scheduling and freedom to pursue individual interests provide the incentive many students need in order to achieve self-fulfillment.

Experiencing success in some manner and to a certain degree is necessary for continuing motivation and worthwhile effort.

All learning experiences potentially have cognitive and affective overtones.

Awareness of such factors as these has prompted growing interest in individualized instruction as a promising alternative to traditional instruction, which, for the most part, has been characterized by —

Slavish use of textbooks

Excessive emphasis on rote learning

Overindulgence in lecturing as the chief means of providing a common body of knowledge for everyone

As these approaches to learning became established—in reality by educators with limited preparation in child development and the learning process—a tradition was born which relatively few dared to challenge until recent years.

Beginning early in the twentieth century interest in individual differences prompted some educators, psychologists, and others to question the sacredness of these techniques and any common body of knowledge assumed necessary for every student. The advent of developmental and behavioral psychology and the findings of research relative to motivation, self-image, and the cognitive and affective aspects of learning have increased interest in the necessity for major educational changes.

THE NECESSITY FOR PLANNED CHANGE

Unproductive methods of teaching children must be changed. Foremost among the factors suggesting the necessity of this change are the following:

The complexities of modern society, beset by revolutionary changes

The unbelievable speed with which knowledge becomes obsolete

The increasing influence of technology

Advances in learning theories

Demands for relevance and personalization in education

The current focus on accountability

Teaching—learning methods of demonstrated value should remain; all else should be modified or discarded. The starting point of change is discontent!

When educational purposes and values are undergoing dramatic changes, schools themselves must assume new responsibilities. For example, schools no longer can give sole priority to the accumulation of facts as the primary basis of knowledge. In order to cope with the continuing crises of society, it is necessary that students learn to operate at levels beyond that of accumulating facts. Essentially, they must be helped in developing thought processes which transcend mere cognitive recognition in order to bring individual relevance to the treatment of facts. In being knowledge-centered, the contemporary school must also be student-centered.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each student, his individual worth and his potential value to society, the school, in going beyond its traditional function of dispensing facts to the masses, is obligated to assist students in learning *how to learn* and *how to make responsible value judgments* by means of the learning process.

Approaching this goal demands planned emphasis on —

Understanding child development

Encouraging a sense of student self-adequacy

Understanding the learning process, its cognitive and affective aspects

Imaginative and flexible use of the classroom as well as all other facilities

Variety and suitability of instructional materials

Creative use of the total environment

Cooperative decision-making, self-discipline, and self-evaluation

Understanding and cooperation among parents and other community personnel

Internal motivation and independent effort

Small-group effort in which each student at times assumes the role of "teacher"

In addition, the school is obligated to regard students as individuals—alike in many respects, yet exceedingly different in interests, needs, and aspirations. This recognition need not isolate students nor deprive them of valuable group experiences. Rather, implementation of this concept will permit students as individuals *and* as groups to contribute to the excellence of other individuals and other groups, while at the same time they are absorbing the excellence of other individuals and other groups.

Planned educational change, no matter how time-consuming and frustrating, must be in terms of improved personal satisfaction in the learning process!

APPROACHES TO INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION

Although all effective individualized instruction demands internal motivation and individual pacing, the implementation of such programs may take many forms in actual practice. Four general types of programs can usually be identified:

Individually Diagnosed and Prescribed. **The school specifies the behavioral objectives and develops systems of materials and methods to enable learners to reach the specified goals.**

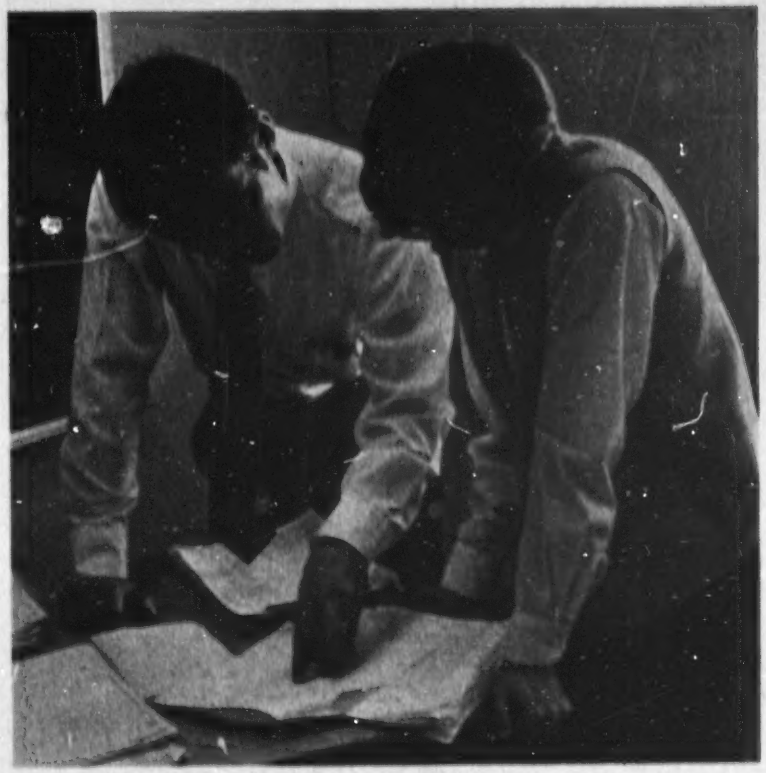
Self-Directed. **The school specifies the curriculum goals and provides—through learning resource centers or learning laboratories—a wide variety of materials; but the individual learner himself selects the materials and methods to meet those goals.**

Personalized. **The learner identifies his own personal learning objectives—based primarily on his individual interests—but the student follows a school-directed program with specified materials.**

Independent Study. **The learner himself determines both the learning objectives and the means to attain them.**

In each of these approaches the emphasis is on the learner. Since learning is personal, unique, and unstandardized, and since learning has numerous dimensions and is without limit, it is imperative that varied types of programs be used to assure the most appropriate one at a given time for each individual. All four approaches may be used simultaneously with a group of students. At times, a particular student may learn best when he works alone on goals which he, himself, has established, and with materials which he alone has selected. At other times, however, the diagnosed needs of this same student may indicate that school-determined objectives and school-selected materials will probably contribute more effectively to his learning experiences.

Regardless of the approach, the teacher never abdicates his responsibility in the area of instruction. The word "individualized" modifies "instruction," implying that the teacher's role at all times is a vital one. He analyzes, he prescribes, he instructs, he guides, he leads, he motivates, he counsels, he stimulates. In individualized instruction the teacher's role becomes increasingly important as he seeks, discovers, and utilizes every possible means for releasing the potential of the individual learner— that potential which is relevant to him personally *and* to the society in which he lives.



BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

Objectives

Objectives of long standing—those pertaining to mental and physical health, intellectual attainment, development of citizenship, worthy use of leisure, occupational competency, and the like—are never omitted from those most frequently stressed in programs of individualized instruction. These goals, however, are placed in a less formal context: They are increasingly translated into behavioral objectives, they are stressed in content areas *and* in the processes utilized, and other goals are held to be equally important. For example, the individualized approach to learning places great emphasis on self-understanding, self-pacing, self-discipline, positive self-concepts, development of emotional stability, the development of attitudes of respect for self and others, the development of creativity, learning to solve problems, and learning to make decisions. Not to be ignored in programs of individualized instruction are specific student objectives, which, too often in the past, have been overlooked or their importance minimized.

Attainment of continuing or long-range objectives, as well as specific or behavioral objectives, demands certain emphases in programs of individualized instruction. Process objectives include emphasis on flexibility as one of the most important components of individualized instruction, independent effort as a major means of promoting responsibility for continuous learning, and daily success in some particular area as vital to personal motivation. Less rigidity in meeting schedules than is normally found in conventional situations often is desirable for providing the climate necessary for relaxed yet determined pursuit of individual excellence. This respect for flexibility, without the debilitating effects of pressures, is not to be confused with a laissez-faire attitude toward learning or a tolerance for nonproductive and unmeaningful activities.

One of the major continuing objectives of individualized instruction is that of creative involvement on the part of every student. In essence, this suggests the enthusiastic releasing of the very best within each student toward a particular effort of current worth and interest to him. Admittedly, the results of such efforts will be many levels of creativity and many levels of excellence. Giving one's best to a self-accepted goal always results in some level of creativity for the individual; and the sense of satisfaction which comes from this experience is one of the greatest rewards of individualized instruction. This type of creativity is a liberating force: it encourages open, positive attitudes; it results in respect for all honest efforts; it does much to engender respect, tolerance, and appreciation of others; it fosters critical thinking. This type of creativity fosters curiosity, the questioning mind, and the courage to explore and try the new. It induces spontaneity and brings about independence, self-confidence, and self-respect. Individualized instruction as an approach to effective learning embraces the concept that creativity is continuing self-discovery. It cannot be forced; it must be developed.

The positive nature of the creative approach suggests that it is the enemy of caution and the antithesis of doubt. In many ways it is synonymous with action and activity, mental or otherwise; and as such brings exhilaration to all who earnestly seek to adopt it as a way of thinking and working. Through the creative approach students are literally recreated; they become new creatures in their acceptance of self, their acceptance of others, and in their wholehearted efforts to be and to do the best of which their total personalities are capable.

Value development and concept development are equally important as continuing objectives in programs of individualized instruction.

Organization

Effective patterns of organization are essential if programs of individualized instruction are to flourish; otherwise, confusion and uncertainty will tend to stifle enthusiasm and determination for achieving the goals of such programs. In many instances new components will need to be added to the organizational structure. For example, provisions will need to be made for the more frequent inclusion of teachers, parents, and students in decision-making processes. Flexibility in scheduling will need to be implemented; functional policies for the utilization of school and community facilities and resources will need to be determined.

Opportunities for teacher planning will have to be considered as assignments are agreed upon, and time for in-service development will need to be considered. Continuing evaluation, modification, and refinement of existing programs will require time and leadership; and these aspects must be realized as organization and operational plans are determined.

Organization need not—perhaps cannot—remain static as programs of individualized instruction are implemented. As experimentation is encouraged, leadership roles will change, and new patterns of working as a total school team will evolve. Flexibility in organization probably will be a major factor in all successful programs of individualized instruction.

What is the Curriculum?

Concepts of the curriculum as a fixed body of knowledge, as well-defined courses, or as identical learning experiences for all students are incompatible with the objectives of a program of individualized instruction. The very nature of individualized instruction forbids conformity and encourages tailor-made programs for specific students. In essence, therefore, approaches must be discovered and devised—and on a continuing basis—to accommodate *what* individual students need at any particular time. In reality, whatever students experience in the school program is the curriculum, a fact which suggests the tremendous significance of many factors: facilities, personalities, methodology, interpersonal relationships, technological aids, and the like.

Accumulation of authoritarian information, so long the major focus in learning, is one thing. Learning to make decisions and accept responsibility; developing attitudes of respect, cooperation, and independence; and learning to solve problems constitute another side of the curriculum. Student response and reaction to every learning experience is still another aspect of the curriculum; and, increasingly, teachers need to be sensitive to these responses. Whatever one learns intellectually has an inseparable emotional dimension.

Determining what is worth knowing should be regarded as a continuing responsibility of administrators, teachers, students, and others who have a right to be involved in educational decision-making. Realizing that knowledge is not static, that truth does not remain the same, and that the differences in students demand differentiated learning experiences—all of this reinforces the concept of continuing and cooperative determination of that which is worth knowing, not only in terms of groups but in terms of individuals also.

The traditional form of education was an authoritarian indoctrination of students by "certified" instructors. The content of education was a fixed and limited body of knowledge, or supposed knowledge, that was assumed by students and teachers to be immutable. We now know that much of the physics of a generation ago is outdated. New interpretations in the social sciences make some of the older emphases obsolete. And recent discoveries relative to self-concept suggest the necessity for various approaches to learning through more meaningful methodology and interpersonal relationships. We also know that increasing emphasis should be placed on the fact that knowledge lies *within*, not *outside* the learner. As individual and community needs change so does the need for variation in subject matter.

Another aspect of the curriculum, more often identified as methodology or teaching techniques, is that of *process*. For example, if learning to work independently or cooperatively is a continuing objective of individualized instruction, then method or process is also content. If it is significant to learn how to use educational media within the school and within the community, the very process becomes part of content. In such situations, truth is arrived at through direct rather than vicarious experiences.

Concepts associated with "process" learning are creativity, critical thinking, independent effort, self-discipline, questioning, imagination, responsibility, and self-realization. On the other hand, "product" learning places great emphasis on courses, term papers, examinations, grades, credits, rigidity, and conformity. There is growing evidence to suggest that cognitive *and* affective learning are greatly enhanced through process learning.

What is known about the learning process, about students, about methodology and the significance of educational media, about motivation, evaluation, and guidance, and about emotional development—all of this multifaceted information suggests the growing imperative that increasing emphasis be placed on "process" learning at all levels of experience. *How* one teaches is just as important as *what* one teaches, if indeed the two can be separated. In the final analysis, education is a process of living, not primarily a preparation for future living.

Curricula of the future should result from the best that is known about changes within society, the needs of individuals, and the successes and limitations of past educational programs. Such knowledge, it is safe to assume, will lead to further individualization of goals as well as means for achieving them. Inherently this suggests increased flexibility and wide expansion of individual curricula. Keeping that which has genuine merit, discarding the worthless, telescoping certain areas into shorter periods of learning, updating emphases, stressing the interdisciplinary approach to learning as a means of lessening fragmentation and duplication, and recognizing what constitutes the total learning environment should contribute much in the next few years toward a revitalization of curricular content.

It is known, for example, that learning involves interaction between learner and environment, and that its effectiveness relates to the frequency, variety, and intensity of the interaction. Further implementation of this concept should result in additional enrichment, relevancy, and individual fulfillment.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PRODUCTIVE INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

Staff

Effectiveness in utilizing the individualized approach to learning demands staff members who are aware of its purposes and who have faith in its possibilities. Basically, staff members must recognize their responsibility for analyzing individual student needs and for directing each student's learning program, whether as an individual or as part of a group. They must *also* recognize that —

Learning is incremental, built block upon block.

Students move into the development of new skills and concepts only after achieving the necessary foundation for this new experience.

Frequent evaluation, preferably done by teacher and student, is imperative in order to determine what next step is most appropriate for the student.

Varying amounts of time must be allowed for students to achieve mastery of specific instructional goals.

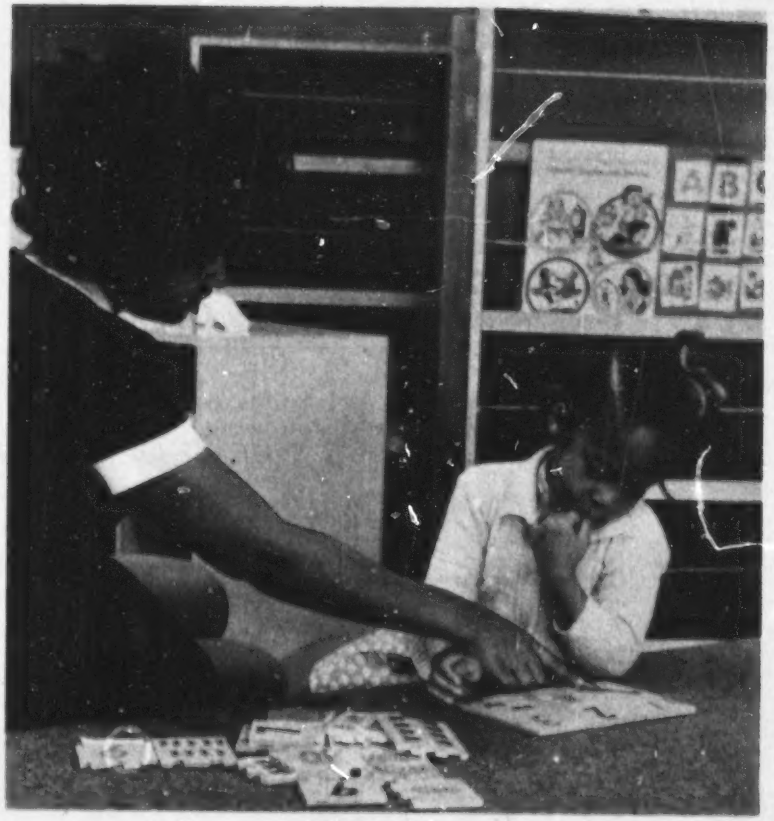
Day-by-day planning is essential in terms of groups *and* in terms of individuals.

Within the framework of individualized instruction, many strategies must be employed in order to utilize to greatest advantage the individual learning styles of students.

Instructional aids available in the classroom and in the total environment must be utilized with imagination and in terms of personal growth and satisfaction.

Classrooms must be organized in such a manner that students can carry out their learning responsibilities with appropriate assistance by the teacher.

Classrooms themselves often will need to be rearranged and redesigned to accommodate day-by-day emphasis on the individual, whose rate of learning varies, and whose needs for instructional aids and teacher assistance also vary.



Each student becomes a teacher some of the time as a means of assuming more responsibility for his own learning, as a means of enhancing his own self-image, and as a means of helping others.

In addition to recognizing these factors, teachers must also recognize their responsibility for accepting new and varied roles if individual student growth and self-fulfillment are to be realized. Dispensing information and testing for remembrance no longer

should be assumed as the teacher's sole or primary responsibility.

Through individualized instruction many natural opportunities are afforded the teacher for exercising his influence in a number of relevant and student-accepted ways. For example, the fact that students learn best when they are involved in the total learning process substantiates the desirability of cooperative determination of needs, as well as processes for meeting these needs. Acceptance of this concept automatically implies teacher responsibility for understanding the total student as well as the student's responsibility for knowing himself. This mutual responsibility for productive teaching-learning experiences suggests many roles for the teacher in his effort to direct the individual growth of each student: consultant, helper, leader, expeditor, catalyst, coordinator, planner, questioner, motivator, enabler, stimulator, counselor. As the concepts inherent in individualized instruction are implemented, outstanding teachers will be needed, teachers who recognize the necessity for assuming many roles.

Assumption of these varying roles does not eliminate the teacher's responsibility for teaching skills and concepts to individuals and to groups when this seems desirable. In efforts to achieve a desirable balance between teacher initiative and student initiative—a balance which frequently may change in terms of individual students and specific situations—the teaching-learning process in programs of individualized instruction will assume new dimensions of meaningfulness for students and teachers.

Alternatives to one teacher in the classroom—authoritarian and traditional for the most part—will need to be considered if the goals of individualized instruction are to be fully realized. The availability of part-time teachers, perhaps on a lend-lease basis from business, industry, and the arts, may be one approach for utilizing the many diverse and needed skills and competencies of leaders throughout the community. Further implementation of the teacher-aide concept may also be a useful approach to improving the learning experiences of individuals. Appropriate use of older students may be another approach.

Accounting daily for the differences in students, teachers will rely less and less on stereotyped lesson plans, and more and more cooperatively formulated individual plans. Learning to stay out of the student's way as he works independently and at his own pace, yet teaching him to seek help when he needs it, will gradually develop into a pattern of working together as the many avenues of individualized instruction are pursued. As teachers gain competence in analyzing individual learning problems, as students sense their strengths and limitations, as learning sequences are cooperatively agreed upon or prescribed, teachers can be assured of improved self-concepts and intensified motivation among their students.

Admittedly, obstacles will continue to plague teachers whose vision goes beyond traditional practices. A number of teachers, desirous of initiating individualized instruction, often feel restrained because of regulations, marking systems, administrative trivia, lay attitudes and pressures, and colleagues who are unsympathetic. Limited opportunities to observe individualized instructional programs in action also tend to perpetuate teacher frustrations and that which is less than their best.

Students

Schools are currently populated by a totally new breed of students—individuals who reflect the revolutionary society in which they live. They grow up quicker than heretofore; they are larger, healthier, more sophisticated, more articulate, more perceptive—and often more frustrated, restless, and confused—than those of previous generations. Yet, their basic needs remain largely the same:

Students need to be accepted, respected, and treated as human beings, distinct entities whose intellectual and emotional dimensions forever challenge the teacher's current awareness of content and techniques.

Students need to be involved in decision-making phases of the teaching-learning process—determining goals, planning for the achievement of goals, and evaluating efforts—as a means of developing internal motivation, purposeful participation, and self-accepted responsibility.

Students need to recognize the conditions under which they themselves learn best in order that they may profit from teacher competencies, instructional aids, use of facilities, associations with peers, and organizational flexibility.

Students need to realize that learning is continuous and that increasingly it should be self-initiated.

Students need to sense relevance and personal meaning in their learning experiences.

These needs, we are learning, can no longer be met solely through traditional means. Involvement in a dynamic program of individualized instruction affords many opportunities for these needs to be satisfied. Daily planning by students, even to the extent of putting these plans into writing, is a sure way of encouraging individual involvement and commitment. These "contracts" or "student agreements" tend to give personal meaning to learning activities. The fact that individualized instruction makes provisions for many alternatives emphasizes respect for individual learning styles—interests, needs, attainment, and pace of learning. In an open and informal atmosphere, creativity is possible; respect for ideas flourishes and purposeful activity is encouraged. In such a climate pertinent conversations may take place with all the attendant values of interaction. Students may be learning skills, often in a variety of ways. With teacher assistance appropriate materials are used, cooperative evaluations are made, and next steps are charted for individuals and for groups.

Administrators

Effective individualized instruction demands administrators who understand and appreciate this concept and who are committed to its potentialities. Such administrators will set the pace for change. They will —

Assume appropriate leadership among staff members in order that team efforts may be characterized by enthusiasm, determination, and harmony

Become familiar with the curriculum, with learning resources, and with recent research findings on how learning best takes place

Become knowledgeable about students themselves, their families, and the communities from which they come

Seek to provide desirable flexibility in facilities and in scheduling

Exert every effort to provide teachers with time for planning

Take the initiative for including parents and other laymen into planning efforts for individualized instruction

Plan with teachers, parents, and students relative to the continuing evaluation of the program

Assist in the interpretation of the program as it progresses

Parents

Parents **also** have responsibilities for the effectiveness of a program of individualized instruction. They must understand its basic concepts, some of the innovations which will occur as a result of its initiation, and certain results which are likely to accure from its operation. They must realize something of the nature of experimentation; they must be willing to become involved in the adventure; and they must demonstrate commitment to the quest to find better ways of individual development.

Administrators and staff members have the obligation to acquaint parents with the philosophy and general operational principles underlying individualized instruction. Approaches to creating awareness, cooperation, and involvement among parents might include group meetings, seminars, private conferences, school visits, and utilization of the many avenues available through multimedia.

In order to minimize frustration and assist parents in understanding the nature of individualized instruction, efforts should be made to help them realize that this approach to learning may include—

Variety in classroom grouping, sometimes according to interest groups, skill groups, conversational groups, planning groups, and the like

Informal yet purposeful movement among students in the classroom, often directed by teacher, frequently student-directed

Utilization of many types of instructional aids, often with teacher direction, frequently student-motivated

Student freedom to use school facilities, the environment, and the community in pursuit of predetermined goals

Many activities under way at the same time

Freedom of students to experiment and to make mistakes; freedom to move into areas of personal interest

Individual effort, small-group effort, total group activities

Extensive utilization of educational media

Much student initiative for planning, for executing plans, and for evaluating efforts

Evaluation primarily in terms of individual achievement rather than in terms of class comparisons

Many student opportunities for critical analysis, for decision-making

Students teaching other students

Considerable emphasis on work and play as being both complementary and appropriate to learning, especially at the elementary level

The absence of conventional equipment and facilities; the rearrangement of equipment and existing facilities; the addition of items, such as rugs, comfortable chairs, lamps

Teachers operating in a number of various roles: perhaps as planners, coordinators, expeditors, enablers, counselors, questioners, leaders

As parents have opportunities, at home and at school, to become convinced that individualized instruction does make a difference in developing intellectual and emotional maturity among their children; as they sense growing acceptance of responsibility among their children; and as they realize that individualized instruction affords opportunities for their children to learn far more than their teachers can teach, then parents will become a tremendous resource for improving the total instructional program.

Community

Effective programs of individualized instruction demand understanding, cooperation, and involvement on the part of the community. Initiative for securing such understanding, cooperation, and involvement is primarily that of administrators and teachers; yet as appreciation for the concept of individualized instruction begins to be accepted within the community, some of the leadership may shift from educators to laymen. A close working relationship with the community is highly desirable as programs of individualized instruction are undertaken. Primarily, the community as a whole needs to understand and appreciate the fact that individualized instruction aims at meeting the personal and special needs of individual students and that all students do not need to learn the same things.

Realizing that visits within the community are highly productive, intellectually and emotionally, agencies, organizations, institutions, and certain personnel within the community should consider themselves active partners in the educational enterprise and cooperate in the arrangement of these visits. As individual and/or group visits are arranged to farms, industries, laboratories, planetariums, colleges, historical sites, and the like, personnel connected with such components of the community should assist in preplanning and later in evaluating such visits. As a corollary, emphasis might also be placed on the utilization of community personnel in the classroom: artists, musicians, mechanics, scientists, dropouts, beauticians, patrolmen, gemologists, mayors, and others. As students mature, it will likely be feasible on many occasions for community organizations, institutions, and agencies themselves to assume increasing responsibility for individualized instruction.

School Boards

Programs of effective individualized instruction likewise demand understanding, cooperation, and commitment from local school boards. Innovations as dramatic and as far-reaching as individualized instruction need school board endorsement and encouragement if they are to be accepted and supported by administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

The school superintendent and other members of the professional staff should assume whatever initiative is needed in

acquainting the school board with the concept of individualized instruction; various approaches which may be utilized in making education personally relevant to each student; and special needs for the successful operation of individualized programs.

Group meetings, individual conferences, seminars with knowledgeable educators as consultants, utilization of multimedia, and visits to classrooms should be encouraged. Knowledge is power! Seeing is believing!

First-hand knowledge relative to individualized instruction and its potentialities on the part of the school board should result in necessary financial commitment for implementation and/or continuation and expansion of such programs.

GETTING STARTED

There are no rigid chronological steps in getting under way with a program of individualized instruction; nevertheless, there are specific considerations which are vital to its effective introduction and implementation:

Prior to the initiation of individualized instruction and during its early stages, time for planning is especially important for teachers. Implementation of concepts and principles must be actualized in the minds of teachers prior to operational efforts. Alternatives in areas such as teaching techniques, use of instructional media, decision-making, and approaches to evaluation likewise must be preconceived. Analysis of available data concerning students must be reviewed. Physical facilities and equipment must be reappraised in terms of maximum usefulness. And, as programs of individualized instruction get under way, more time than usual will be needed for assessment and refinement of procedures.

In direct and in subtle ways students should be apprised of what individualized instruction really is, how much responsibility becomes theirs even as teachers assist each student more than ever before, and how freedom and flexibility will be respected in terms of each student's pursuing that which seems best for him. Creating this awareness among students must be continuous and must be achieved largely through the teaching style of teachers, not through lofty words.

Assessing the strengths and limitations of students is mandatory for an effective beginning of individualizing instruction. Knowing where the learning is at all times is necessary for determining where he should go. Diagnosis, of course, may take many forms: observations, tests, conversations, journal entries, self-evaluation, and the like.

Deciding where the learner goes may be the independent responsibility of teacher or student at times; or it may be cooperative. Yet, while students are becoming adjusted to the strategies of individualized instruction, the teacher should do everything possible to limit uncertainty and confusion on the part of students. Decision-making, a major aspect of individualized instruction, necessarily may be a major responsibility of teachers in the early stages of individualized instruction, whether for large- or small-group learning.

Grouping must have personal and positive meaning for students. Groups must be organized on the basis of self-accepted tasks to be accomplished and should never in any way stigmatize the student. Grouping at times may be solely the responsibility of the teacher; at other times, students should have the opportunity of forming groups for reasons which seem appropriate to them; more often, groups will likely be formed in terms of mutual decision-making. Groups need not remain static; in fact, such rigidity would defeat the whole concept of individualized instruction. Students should move from one group to another in view of their learning edge and according to their interests. In this way, self-concept remains high and productive learning becomes a real possibility.

Evaluation sessions must be frequent in a program of individualized instruction. Individuals, with teacher guidance, must appraise their efforts as choices are determined for future activity. Similarly, small group effort and total class effort must be evaluated as a means of moving ahead with intelligence and with a sense of security. As continuous evaluation becomes a way of life, students recognize that evaluation itself is a major part of the learning process.

Becoming aware of current resources—facilities, educational media, available personnel—and discovering ways to use these most productively might well be one of the major emphases as individualized instruction gets under way. Resource or media centers, library corners, laboratories, shops, special interest rooms, and open spaces, may well take on new significance as students perceive the possibilities of individualized instruction.

Securing instructional aids of such variety, quality, and quantity that all students have reasonable access to what is needed is of utmost importance for the success of a program of individualized instruction, especially in its beginning stages. Since administrative funds are not always sufficient for procuring needed instructional aids, much initiative may be left to the imagination of teachers, students, and parents—especially in the area of free and inexpensive items. Experience has shown that many items appropriate for the elementary classroom may be rounded up in almost any community:

- Carpet scraps from furniture stores for learning centers so children may sit on the floor
- Wooden reels from power and telephone plants to be used as tables
- Measuring tools, wallpaper, linoleum samples, and wooden sticks from the paint store
- Maps and pamphlets from the highway department
- Old magazines and newspapers for the vertical file
- Rocks and shells
- Old garments for the costume closet.

Items useful at the high school level might include—

- Old motors
- Old cars
- Items for the vertical file
- Properties for drama classes
- Newspapers for the journalism class
- Records and tapes for musical interest groups
- Historical souvenirs for history classes.

Obviously, the list is endless and results of scavenging can be fantastic with overtones of fun and worthwhile learning experiences.

Attractive as well as functional rooms are often associated with programs of individualized instruction; and there is evidence to support the fact that many students do their best work in colorful, attractively arranged rooms. Though the teacher need not become an interior decorator, he may initiate and supervise modifications within the classroom which create a pleasant atmosphere for everyone. Rugs, lamps, easy chairs, and pictures frequently add a touch that is helpful. Eliminating as much of the formalized furniture as seems feasible, especially in elementary classrooms, often sets the stage for many happy and creative learning experiences. As students participate in such rearrangements and refurbishings, emphasis can be placed on planning, decision-making, cooperative work habits, initiative, leadership, problem-solving, appropriate use of colors, measurements, and functional use of space. Equally important are the values inherent in conversing, creating, and in the imaginative release of ideas.

There is no single timetable appropriate for all schools which wish to initiate programs of individualized instruction; nevertheless, careful planning will demand the formulation of an event schedule which can be used as a guide for all those concerned with the program.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION

Techniques for individualizing instruction in and of themselves may be unproductive, but when employed in a total atmosphere conducive to individual development, they assume genuine significance.

Since students learn as individuals, no matter what the settings, **learning experiences in groups may be just as individualized as when students work alone or when there is direct one-to-one relationship between teacher and student.** The critical factor in any case is the personal meaningfulness of what's happening in large-group, small-group, or natural-group situations. Of course, students must be ready for any particular form of individualized instruction before it can be valuable. Developing new skills and reinforcing previously learned skills—whether in language arts, mathematics, music, physical education, for example—may best be approached when teacher and student recognize the need for this. Reading, listening, writing, painting, and experimenting in scientific areas are most meaningful when the student as an individual senses the need and/or desire for engaging in these activities.

Opportunities for individualizing instruction may also include—

Independent study; flexible scheduling; team teaching; use of multiple texts; programmed materials; tape materials prepared by teachers, students, and "outside" resource persons; instant drills; short electives

Correlation of subject matter and interests

Effective use of study guides; pairing of students; use of practice-recordings in class, after school, or at home

Individual and dual sports; interscholastic athletics; driver education; movement education for elementary students; visitations

Viewing films and film strips; keeping a photographic or tape record of special events

Instruction is also individualized when students assist other students in clarifying concepts, in executing projects, in learning to use instructional aids and equipment, and in evaluating efforts. Observing and tending to animals, preparing bulletin boards, and filing materials for later use are other examples of individualized learning. Planning each day's work, keeping a record of what's accomplished, and appraising the effectiveness of one's efforts are also genuine activities with major overtones of individuality.

Similarly, oral and written reports, demonstrations, dramatizations, creative writing, devising games, formulating quizzes, participation in panels and debates, and engaging in conversations and discussions likewise afford opportunities for individualizing instruction. Participation in decision-making on a daily basis suggests still another way whereby learning may be individualized.

EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Frequent evaluation of student performance and student behavior is fundamental to the success of any program of individualized instruction. Teachers and students at all times are accountable for productive learning. The manner in which evaluation is done is of utmost importance, however. In the first place, teachers need to demonstrate in all their relationships with students that continuing evaluation is a major aspect of the total learning process—analysis, planning, and implementation.

Students need to understand and appreciate the fact that self-evaluation *and* cooperative evaluation, in terms of specific objectives, are perhaps the best known of all approaches to evaluation. This in no way negates the values inherent in appropriate tests, inventories, observations, and the like. Without intelligent appraisal of purposes, approaches for achieving purposes, and the degree to which purposes are attained, students and teachers would have no sound basis on which to plan future growth and progress.

Achieving the goals of individualized instruction forbids exclusive use of comparative marking systems, though occasional comparisons may be useful for improving the total program. Student progress in programs of individualized instruction must be appraised in terms of each individual's potential; otherwise, such programs are not individualized. Acceptance of this fact makes conventional marking systems sterile. Commitment, however, to the values inherent in individualized instruction will tend to minimize the problems associated with comparative grading. Moreover, commitment to the goals of individualized instruction will provide schools with a realistic opportunity for proving their accountability in terms of avowed purposes.

All evaluations should be made in terms of what teachers and students expect in terms of outcomes. The more specific the objectives, the easier it is to evaluate effectively.

ADVANTAGES OF INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

Since individual self-fulfillment is widely recognized as a major goal in education, and since achievement of this goal too often has fallen far short of realization, school personnel and a wide segment of the public have begun to insist on improved approaches to learning. Wherever schools have moved from traditional instructional practices to programs of individualized instruction, much satisfaction has been experienced. Much of this satisfaction has been based on the fact that:

Student responses, for the most part, have been positive; teachers have noted increased interest in academic activities and in school in general.

Self-concepts among students have tended to remain or become positive, thereby providing for maximum learning.

Traditional disciplinary problems have virtually disappeared because of meaningful involvement.

The enthusiasm of students has been transmitted to parents, and the favorable experiences of teachers and administrators have been acknowledged by school boards.

Schools with such programs have received renewed attention, encouragement, and approval from their communities.

Teachers have expressed satisfaction in their efforts, even though they have admitted working harder than ever before.

Some administrators have expressed conviction that, once the transition is made, individualized instruction may be a partial solution for slowing down spiraling school costs, since it provides an opportunity for more efficient utilization of teachers and support personnel.

Teachers interested primarily in covering subject matter have often expressed commitment to the individualized approach as an effective means of learning.